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AN ADDRESS IN MEMORY
OF JAMES A. GARFIELD

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IN MEMORY OF

JAMES A. GARFIELD.

LATE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

BY

NATHANIEL J. BURTON.

Pastor of Park Church, Hartford, Conn.,

SEPT. 25, 1881.

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ADDRESS.

It is impossible to add aught to that unprecedented outpouring and testimony which day after day has filled the daily journals of this country and the world in regard to President Garfield, his life and his death. And yet it does not seem possible, even if it were fitting, to let this holy day pass, and our worship go on, without some further remembrance of him, and some further observations upon that great event which we all so deplore. Will you give me your attention then for a few moments while I recount some things which tend to make this very sorrowful loss of ours not wholly intolerable to our hearts.

I. It is enough to fill us with a deep and solemn joy that our President was ready to go, as having long been established in the Christian faith, and long accustomed to carry the burdens and meet the ills of life, in the strength of Him who is all things for evermore unto his beloved. He was born into a family steadfast in God. He was piously and diligently taught from the first. He went forth to his first tasks with the faith of his mother strong in him. He consecrated himself to the service of his country in war, not only as a patriot but as a Christian. He trusted in the Lord God of hosts in all the perils of battle. He returned to civil life, and legislative service, on principle. And all through his long public career he kept himself personally pure, defended this and that in God's name, drew close to God in prayer and frequent worship, and commended himself

unto all men as a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore it was to be expected that he would come up to death with an inspired courage, as he did, and would leave the millions who mourn for him to rejoice themselves in a thankfulness which words cannot express. He sleeps in Jesus, blessed sleep.

II. I remind you too that although at first his death seems untimely, because he was not yet old, and because his children were yet young, and because he seemed to be on the eve of doing more for his country than he had ever done, nevertheless he had, in fact, rounded out an uncommonly full life; a life indeed so complete in great services that any of us would be more than satisfied if we could work out one like it. There was no time lost in his fifty years. In his very childhood he began his tasks, and from that time on till his breath ceased in death his hand and head and heart were busy and his manly earnestness never flagged. After some years of hard manual labor, and after some suitable preparation for it, he became a teacher, than which no vocation more draws on a man's powers, more inspires a true and good heart, or more tells on the welfare of the world. And, according to all accounts, what his hands found to do in that pursuit he did with his might, and in a conscience void of offence towards God and man.

Then, later, in 1861, he with characteristic zeal and devotion, responded to the first call of his country for men to put down rebellion, and on that new field, by universal consent, he carried himself with an ability, and a self-forgetfulness, and a success, very honorable to himself and beneficial to his country. Already he had arrived at a point where it could hardly have been called untimely had he died.

But his most serviceable and brilliant years were still before him, for now he enters the national congress and for eighteen years on that conspicuous floor, and at one of the most important periods of our history, he stood in the front rank of debaters and parliamentarians, upholding the great principles in behalf of which the great war had been fought through, assisting to lay anew the foundations of the republic, and furnishing to the political student and the statesman of coming years a body of speeches, arguments, and orations, on matters fundamental to the public welfare, as vigorous and massive, as high-minded, and as true to the laws of God, as anything of the kind in all our later history.

A powerful orator on the field of civil debate and in perilous times, a man of presence and courage and great-heartedness, and of ingrained and incorruptible high principle, is one of the finest figures on earth, and Mr. Garfield could have afforded to rest from his labors if he had left only his parliamentary renown to speak for him unto succeeding times.

III. But I do not know but the man has accomplished as much in his dying as ever he did by his living—though it should be said that his dying would have been a comparatively futile event, had he not already greatly commended himself to his people by the solid and even resplendent services of his life. Many good men and saints of God passed away on that sad September 19th, which saw him go, but the world at large did not even know who they were, and could only think of his going; and the reason for that was (in large part) that his life had been filled with works well-done that bore directly and visibly upon the interests of this entire nation, and therefore of all mankind.

But many a man of great services has not been so for-

fortunate as our President was in working great results upon his bed of death.

Just note how that matter stands.

In the first place, those openings of domestic love which have come to the observation of mankind during our long and terrible days of waiting and watching by his bedside, have been a very gospel to the universal heart of man. The pathos of it has been something utterly irresistible. Gen. Garfield's early home life, his affectionate laborious mother, his older brothers sacrificing themselves for him the little one, his first contributions to the comfort of the family when he grew to be old enough to do anything, his marriage to the girl whom he had taught in his school, his devotion to her, and hers to him, during all the days of their early hard pulling together, his instinctive recognition of her, and of the mother who bore him, in that kiss of mingled memory and affection, so much commented upon, which he gave them when he had taken the Presidential oath and stood at last on one of the awful summits of the world; all these home-bred realities which have been gradually disclosed are a benediction I say and an education to all human-hearted persons even unto the ends of the earth. And then, to crown all, how during these last eighty days of trial the name and form of Lucretia Garfield have gradually come into the foreground; the woman, gentle, strong, and faithful; and how the kings of the earth, and the statesmen, magistrates, and parliaments, of the whole civilized world have saluted from afar that gentle form, and have rained their benedictions upon her head, she meanwhile pursuing her daily way and bearing her daily dreadful burden in a quietness that was sublime, the quietness of a life-long love for him who was fading away before her eyes, and of a life-long trust in his God

and hers. I do not know that ever in the history of the world has a woman been set upon just such an eminence, and in the blaze of it has carried herself in such absolute modesty, sweetness, and strength.

I repeat: it is to be mentioned among the felicities of General Garfield's career, and as one of his final services to mankind, that he and his in the providence of God have stood before the world in a domestic picture most edifying to contemplate. It is one star in his diadem of stars that his domestic life would bear the world-wide publicity to which it has been exposed.

Another work which he has wrought in his dying, as he was not able to do in his active life, is this: he has exhibited the highest qualities of the human soul under a pressure to which not many are ever subjected, and in thus doing he has delivered a lesson and an exhortation to us all. Behold what patience there was in him, what equanimity under the terrible fluctuations of his case, what consideration for those about him, what courage to the very last, what steadfast silent refusal to load those whom he loved with any anxiety or foreboding of his own, if he had any. Of course these special, fine, attributes were in him long before, and had a good deal of exercise doubtless in his years of war, and in his many struggles of debate and legislation; but they came to their utmost in his long final contest with death; and besides they were displayed on a vastly more public theatre than ever before, and under circumstances impressive beyond all parallel. What a preacher of the best things of character he was, and is.

I but put forth a variation of the same theme when I add that in his long dying he did a matchless service in whelming all sections and classes in this country in a common noble and tender feeling, and melting all nations

into such a unity of the heart as was never known. A few years since, we had not those wonderful methods of swift intercommunication which we now have, so that a world-wide solidarity of feeling, such as we have seen of late, was impossible. It took weeks to get a message to England, and months to reach the outmost nations; but now the stroke of General Garfield's pulse at any given moment, was simultaneously observed by the entire circle of the populations of the globe—and this sense in all men's minds that they were sitting together, at the same moment, over the same sufferer, watching the swell and ebb of his life, greatly assisted their interflow of emotion, and unified them in a manner truly wonderful. And certainly that is a good thing. We, the nations, are divided from each other by long intervals of sea and land; by diverse blood and training and history, by the memory of old wars in some instances, and by a general inability to see eye to eye on a thousand things. But these many tones of dissonance were all drowned in one mighty melody of peace and love around the couch of our suffering President; and from no land among all lands have we received expressions more heart-melting than from our enemy of years ago—Great Britain—whose Queen, overriding the conventionalities of royalty, and grounding herself on her womanhood and her recollection of her own sorrows, has put herself heart to heart with Mrs. Garfield, and with our whole people, in despatch after despatch from her own hand; has ordered her court into mourning, and by a command to her ambassador at Washington, has placed upon the President's bier a wreath with these words: "Queen Victoria, to the memory of the late President Garfield—an expression of her sorrow and sympathy with Mrs. Garfield and the American Nation—Sept. 22, 1881." I think that the American people will

be ready now as never before to subscribe their amen to the words of the Poet Laureate of England, when he said and sung years ago, addressing his Queen :

“ May you rule us long,
And leave us rulers of your blood,
As noble till the latest day ;
May children of our children say,
“ She wrought her people lasting good.”

Her court was pure, her life serene,
God gave her peace, her land reposed ;
A thousand claims to reverence closed,
In her as Mother, Wife and Queen.

And statesmen at her council met,
Who knew the seasons when to take
Occasion by the hand and make,
The bounds of freedom wider yet,

By shaping some august decree,
Which kept her throne unshaken still,
Broad-based upon her people's will,
And compassed by the inviolate sea.”

Men and brethren, in this unity of peoples and kingdoms, brought about of late by our anxiety and woe, you have an illustration of what is permanently possible, yes, of what shall actually be, in the golden age of the world, when

“ No more shall nation against nation rise,
Nor ardent warriors meet with hateful eyes,
Nor fields with gleaming steel be covered o'er,
The brazen trumpets kindle rage no more ;
But useless lances into scythes shall bend,
And the broad faulchion in a ploughshare end.”

Another victory of our dying President, and another universal service to right thinking and right feeling, is the demonstration furnished in his case that the radicalism of those who say, “ One man is as good as another,”

meaning thereby that a man is to be taken for what he personally is, and is to have no esteem or deference on account of any official standing he may have, is wrong and cannot be vindicated. We, in this country, (many of us,) have often ridiculed the homage paid to kings and queens and other grand officials in the old lands over the sea, especially in instances where those grantees have been in themselves insignificant, and even contemptible. But the truth is, the person who happens to be the sovereign of England (for example,) at any given time, be that person man or woman, wise or foolish, moral or immoral, has two great distinctions which entitle him, (or her) to unusual deference. *First* (to use the very language of St. Paul on this subject), "He is the minister of God,"—"for there is no power but of God,—the powers that be are ordained of God"—"for this cause pay ye tribute also, for they are God's ministers." Therefore when Thomas Jefferson wrote in our Declaration of Independence, in 1776, that, "all governments derive their just power from the consent of the governed," he did not cover the whole truth on that subject. He did not bring in St. Paul's idea at all. It was natural that a man of his religious views should not. Moreover it was natural that all our people in that day should tend to lose sight of the divine side of human government, and dwell altogether on the people as the source of power and authority, because they were just then falling back on the extreme right of revolution against their oppressive King,—George the Fourth of England—who had lost his divine right to be their monarch if he ever had any, they would all say. As time went on, and our national experience was enlarged in several great crises, (notably in the war of the Rebellion in 1861,) men began to recover that lost doctrine of *Rulers the Ministers of God*—and our whole

onset on the insurrectionary Southern people was just a gigantic statement of that doctrine, as against their Jeffersonian notion that no government has any authority a moment longer than the people like. We have shed the blood of myriads of men and have expended money by the billion, to establish St. Paul's assertion, and prove that a civil ruler is more than that same man would be as a private citizen, and is entitled to more consideration.

And now in these last days the same truth has been announced in another way—viz.: in the honor, at once magnificent and tender, which has been accorded to Gen. Garfield, with a spontaneity and a whole-heartedness which was universal. It was because he was the anointed of God (that in part) that the best surgeons the land could afford stood guard at his bedside, that innumerable letters of love and good cheer were poured in upon him, that every Sabbath service in the land made mention of his ease before God, that every day at millions of family altars petitions were sent up, that other lands hailed him and blessed him in continual telegrams, that railway companies stood ready to carry him whithersoever he would, ministering to his weakness by their utmost skill, as though they were carrying an angel, and, now that he is dead, it is because God's minister is dead that the bells are tolled all round the world.

I said that as over against that radicalism which says one man is as good as another, the fact is, every ruler has two distinctions which make it fitting he should be revered. The first distinction I have mentioned. He is the vice-regent of the Most-High. And the second is that in him is embodied and symbolically set forth, everything that makes the nation over which he presides to be a nation. The American people are fifty millions strong, and Gen. Garfield in his own person was those

millions. We all headed up in him. So we felt and so it was. When he was shot, we were shot. When the Pennsylvania Railway Company took him up tenderly in its arms, him and his whole household, and fled with him as on wings to the healing airs of the sea, hushing all along the way the thunder of their countless trains, and rolling into Long Branch with their precious burden like armies coming home from victory, every man of us felt that he himself had received a personal attention from that great corporation. Great is the power of symbols and symbolic persons. Remember what the flag was to us in 1861, when it was attacked. In ordinary times it swings from its staff a beautiful object and sufficiently dear, but in times of national peril, by a grand movement of the imagination the people flock to it, and set their eyes upon it, and glorify it beyond all power of expression; because it is natural in great excitements to sum up all that we think and all that we feel in symbols that are compact and vivid, and continually visible. So the army can the better push into the battle with that in sight. So the dying soldier can the more calmly die when that waves before him. So the legislator can the more devotedly act for his country's good, when in the air over the hall where he sits floats that emblem of nationality.

In the case of the flag our enthusiasm is aroused by a symbol pure and simple—that is, the flag in itself is nothing, all its interest is symbolical. In the case of a symbolic person, as our President, there are three interests combined; first, the man; secondly, the man as God's agent; and thirdly, the man as the representative of our nationality. And if the man in himself is strong, good, and attractive (that first), and if the man has been duly chosen, so that he is God's minister and our

representative indeed (that second), then all conceivable forces of influence are met in him, and there is no end to the delight with which his people look upon him, no end to their indignation when he is insulted, or their gratification when he is respected, no end to their sorrow when he suffers, their mourning when he dies, and their tearful thankfulness when the nations of the earth uncover their heads about his bier, and lift up their dirges and the lamentations of their bells over his grave.

Thank God, that the essentially representative character of a ruler has again been mightily declared,—his character as representing God, and his character as the personification of his nation,—and thank God that Mr. Garfield was such a kind of man, so able, noble, and good, that when we come to pay him the official honors that belong to him, we are not filled with any reluctance as though Garfield the man was less and meaner than Garfield the magistrate, but contrariwise, we gather about him with the entire affirmation of our judgment and conscience, and the entire homage of our hearts.

And now, one other point, wherein he did a special great work in his last days, and made his bed of death more a throne than his chair of office could ever be.

In the first place, his protracted disability, with its intense fluctuations of hope and fear, has brought this nation to their knees, with remarkable unanimity and earnestness; and has notified them of their own instinctive and ineradicable confidence that there is a God, and a personal God, and a God who desires to be entreated by his creatures. In prosperous times it is easy to conceive doubts and bring forth many vaporings of argument to the effect that as likely as not there is not any God, or if there is, that he cannot certainly be found out, or if he can be found out, that it is of no use to urge him to do

this or that, his mind having been made up from all eternity, and his plans laid out. But in the stress of disaster the soul is apt to settle back upon its inevitable knowledge, its primary affirmatives which, as often as any way, lie below its ordinary easy observation, (just as in dying, not unfrequently, the memory calls up numerous things which had not been thought of since childhood, and which would have been supposed to have lapsed from the mind forever) and so, in the twinkling of an eye, you shall see the forty atheistic surmises that may have half undermined the faith of a great people exploded as by the seven thunders of God; and down upon their knees they go, and the sky resounds with their outcries. Not every one of their out-criings has in it all the elements of prayer, nevertheless it is good that God is thus practically acknowledged; and what a work he has accomplished, who in prostration and feebleness, yea, and by force of that very feebleness, has thus constrained and solemnized and bowed down a whole nation.

But it turns out that this wrestling unanimity of petition has been resolutely negated by the Most High—in which I notice two things. First, a most impressive self-assertion, and awful sovereignty, on his part; and secondly, a special challenge to our faith. I cannot well describe my sense of the majesty of God as made known in this his recent refusal of the desire of his people. O! that monarchial will! Which is by no means a cold will though, but a warm one. It is not likely that he who created Mr. Garfield, and redeemed him, and brought him into the Kingdom of his grace, would withhold from him any good thing out of sheer cold-heartedness. No, that enthroned will, before which all creatures are as insects in the shadow of Mt. Blanc, is as suffused with

every conceivable geniality as that same white and holy Swiss Mountain is, when the descending sun has laid upon it its tinges and blushes and heavenly afterglows. In so far as God's will is resolute and will not bend, at this or that point where we think we would like it to bend, the explanation must be that he sees all things in their relations and the end from the beginning, and is committed by the whole stress of his love to safeguard all welfares ; so that, that absolutism of his which rejects a nations' prayer is just his all-including tenderness doing its proper work. It would be a dreadful state of things if people, by massing themselves and prolonging their urgencies, could get in upon the feeling of God in a way to make him forget his wisdom for the moment, and his obligations of affection to other peoples and interests, and bestow a gift as when an inconsiderate mother unable to resist a teasing child, grants unto him that which eventually destroys his life.

The subject of prayer, its answers and refusals, is one too large to be treated just here ; so that all I can undertake to say for the present is, that in God's denial of us of late, we have an inconceivably robust notice served on us of his fatherly absolutism ; and a call also to trust him perfectly because although absolute he is fatherly. We have it for our special privilege just now to walk by faith. Plainly we cannot walk by sight. If our President had been spared in concession to our agony we should have had a touch of sight, (such as God often grants,) but as it is, there is nothing left for us but to rest in faith—unless indeed we choose to let our grief run away with us, and land us in Atheism. And Atheism is not sight but rather everything negative, and dark, and distressing.

For my part, I have taken pains years ago, to look this

matter of prayer through, in so far as one can—and the result is that the removal of our dear President when all mankind wanted him and prayed for him, not merely does not bewilder my hold on God, but sends me to him in a new devotion. Yes, it is a solemn exhilaration to observe that august fortitude with which he adheres to the best, even though for the time being he may seem inclement to the suffering creatures and multitudes who throng to his feet. You are safe, and I am safe, and all things are safe, under the shelter of an administration which is braced and buttressed by such integrities.

And as to prayers, why put them in none the less because of these invincibilities in God, because he has told us to, and because many a blessing is secured by prayer, (even visibly sometimes,) and because God's refusals are rich in glorious results, precisely as the wealth of many a man is the result of self-denials inculcated and forced upon him by his father when he was young and more full of wishes and longings than of wisdom.

Brethren, I have now thrown upon one of the gloomiest and most heart-breaking events of the nineteenth century, two or three sweet crosslights of comfort, and whereinsoever the death of this much admired and beloved man still seems gloomy to your sympathetic and disappointed feeling, I pray that you will try to rest in faith, patiently waiting for that sure day when God's full explanations shall pour in, and every darkness of his earthly providence shall seem to shine before our adoring eyes with an absolute refulgence, even the refulgence of his perfect love.

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